

U.S./Tunisian Cooperation

The United States has valued strong diplomatic relations with Tunisia for over 200 years. On March 26, 1799, the first agreement of friendship and trade was concluded between Tunisia and the United States. The first American consulate was established in Tunis on January 20, 1800. On May 17, 1956, the U.S. was the first great power to recognize the sovereign state of Tunisia. In March 1957, an agreement for American economic and technical aid, the first in a long series, was signed in Tunis. In 1961, Tunisia became the first Arab country to request and receive Peace Corps Volunteers, starting a partnership between our two countries that spanned 34 years and enabled 2,382 Americans to join forces with the people of Tunisia in a common endeavor to improve the human condition.

Today the ties of friendship and cooperation between Tunisia and the United States continue to be strengthened within the framework of progress towards the ideals and values of liberty, democracy, and free enterprise. The programs listed below represent an ongoing commitment to a historic and mutually beneficial relationship between the American and Tunisian people.

Commercial and Economic Relations

- The U.S. - Tunisia TIFA (Trade and Investment Framework Agreement) process got off to an excellent start with the first Council meeting in October 2003. A second TIFA Council meeting was held in Tunis on June 15, 2005.
- U.S. investment in Tunisia stands at approximately \$600 million since 1994.
- According to the Government of Tunisia's National Institute of Statistics, the U.S. imported roughly \$445 million in products from Tunisia in 2004 (up 29% from 2003) and exported almost \$143 million in products to Tunisia (up 130% from 2003) – the largest figure ever of U.S. exports to the country.
- About 60 U.S. companies have direct investment in Tunisia. The majority are in the energy, IT manufacturing for export, telecommunications, and medical equipment supply sectors. There are numerous other U.S. companies represented in Tunisia.
- U.S. companies currently employ approximately 12,000 Tunisians.

Middle East Partnership Initiative

The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) is the United States Government's response to calls for change in the Middle East. This Presidential initiative, created in 2002 and funded with bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, has brought the resources, experience, and determination of the United States to bear in an effort to bolster the reform movement in the Middle East.

A regional office based at the U.S. Embassy in Tunis opened in August 2004 to promote and coordinate MEPI activities across North Africa, the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon. The U.S. Government has provided funding for Tunisian participation in a variety of bilateral and regional programs under MEPI. These include, but are not limited to:

- Commercial Law Development Program

\$1 million Department of Commerce program that focuses on job creation and growth especially in advanced technology sectors, intellectual property rights reform and enforcement,

bankruptcy/reorganization reform, transparency in government procurement, antidumping laws and procedures, competition law and policy, electronic customs practices, E-commerce and banking.

➤ Public Opinion Polling in the Political Process

As part of a regional MEPI grant to the International Republican Institute (IRI) to support democratic reform, IRI held a conference in Tunis in September, 2005 on public opinion polling and the role it plays in the political process. Participants from across North Africa and the Middle East included political party, media, polling firm and academic representatives.

➤ MEPI Judicial and Legal Reform

\$4.9 million regional project (including Tunisia) that will focus on the continuing education of foreign public defenders, prosecutors, and judges on critical principles of code reform for criminal and civil law, constitutional reform, human rights, and methods to preserve judicial independence. In addition, MEPI will add training elements on the administration of justice such as case management and alternative dispute resolution to ensure judicial and legal systems can operate in efficient and effective manners.

➤ University Linkages Program

Through MEPI and other U.S. government funding, Tunisia currently has nine university linkages of up to \$300,000 each for partnerships between colleges and universities in the United States and Tunisia, enabling universities to work to strengthen university programs in a number of different disciplines: business and economics; agriculture; education; and American studies.

➤ Middle East Entrepreneur Training (MEET) Program

\$1.5 million regional program designed to provide skills training, professional networking, and alumni support systems to increase local managerial and entrepreneurial skills and the number of voices championing a larger role for the private sector in Arab economies.

➤ Summer Institutes: Study of the United States

Through these intensive summer institutes, Arab university and high school student leaders from the region gain a deeper understanding of the values, institutions, and conflicts distinguishing American life. Through course work, dialogue with guest speakers, and visits to sites of interest, the students see the United States from a diversity of cultural, political and geographical perspectives. The students are given opportunities to share their experiences and views with peers in the United States and to participate in local civic and volunteer activities. Six Tunisian students attended the 2004 Summer Institutes while five Tunisians participated in the 2005 program.

➤ Small Grants Program – “Building Change”

The Small Grants Program continues a highly successful effort to build ties between the U.S. mission and local organizations for capacity building projects that support MEPI goals and objectives and focus on empowering and building the capacity of local civil society and private

sector organizations. The Small Grants Program provides institutional strengthening grants of up to \$25,000 through the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. Seven such grants have been awarded thus far to diverse members of Tunisian society, including four in 2004 and three in 2005. New grants are currently being reviewed in the current fiscal cycle as part of this ongoing program.

➤ U.S. Business Internships for Young Arab Women

A \$2 million regional program to provide talented young women from the Middle East, including Tunisia, unique opportunities to learn, in academic and practical settings, management and business skills while working in the dynamic and productive U.S. business environment. Two Tunisian women were among the 42 Arab women who participated during the fall 2004 program, involving a mini-MBA course and several months, substantive internship with U.S. companies.

(For further information, please visit <http://mepi.state.gov>)

Science and Technology Cooperation

The United States Government and the Government of Tunisia signed an Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation in June 2004. This is one of twenty-nine such bilateral agreements that the United States has signed around the globe. These agreements aim to support collaborations on a wide range of issues in the areas of science and technology, advancing common goals in this regard and supporting partnerships between governmental entities, public and private research institutions, and industry. Programs on Science and Technology with Tunisia include:

- The United States National Weather Service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration conducted an April 2005 workshop on the modernization of Tunisia's weather forecasting capabilities. The next phase of this project will include the visit of Tunisian officials to the U.S. to study American weather forecasting equipment and to review operating procedures there.
- A team of scientists from NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center, the NOAA/National Weather Service, the Department of the Interior's U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Department of Agriculture visited Tunisia in May 2005 as part of a regional assessment of the entire water cycle.
- In October 2005, two NASA scientists came to Tunisia on the occasion of the annular solar eclipse. During their visit, they lectured at the Tunis Cité des Sciences and at ESPRIT, a private Tunisian engineering school. The NASA scientists then traveled with members of the Tunisian Young Science Association (AJST) to Douz to view the solar eclipse. In conjunction with this visit, NASA produced a poster in English, Arabic, and French on solar eclipses that was widely distributed in Tunisia and throughout the region. Funding was also provided for the production of a documentary for youth on the visit of the NASA scientists. As part of this project, two Tunisian students traveled to the United States and visited NASA, an American astronomy club, the University of Maryland, and the National Air and Space Institute.
- The U.S. State Department worked to build linkages between U.S. and Tunisian science researchers at the university level to encourage bilateral scientific advancement, to support

innovation, and to build strong coalitions between our countries' universities, technology parks and, in the longer term, between our private industries.

Agricultural Cooperation

The Office of Agricultural Affairs (OAA), which represents the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)/Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in Tunisia, works to improve market access for U.S. agricultural products and to build demand through technical cooperation and financial assistance. OAA currently plays an important supporting role to bilateral agricultural trade worth more than an annual average of \$110 million per year (2000-04 period). This trade is mainly comprised of bulk products (wheat and corn) and intermediate products (soybean meal, vegetable oils, and planting seeds). It is worth noting that agricultural goods account for more than 40 percent of U.S.-origin merchandise exports to Tunisia.

Agricultural cooperation handled by OAA, on behalf of USDA/FAS, is multi-faceted and includes:

➤ Financial assistance

OAA administers commercial export financing whereby credit lines are offered each year to Tunisian companies to acquire U.S.-origin agricultural products and equipment. These credit lines amounted to \$70 million in FY 2005.

➤ Trade capacity building and training

OAA, along with several of the commodity groups active in Tunisia such as U.S. Wheat Associates, American Soybean Associates, US Grains Council and World Wide Sires, sponsors Tunisian participation in a variety of training programs and workshops both inside and outside the country. They also provide technical assistance to improve industrial processes in such areas as the grain milling and dairy industries.

Since 1995, OAA has selected and funded training programs for more than 120 Tunisian officials in the framework of the Cochran Fellowship Program. Two additional programs were added in 2005: The Norman E. Borlaug fellowship program which helps strengthen sustainable agricultural practices by providing short-term scientific training and collaborative research opportunities to visiting Tunisian researchers and policy makers and the Faculty Exchange Program (FEP) whereby Tunisian agricultural educators spend a period of 5 to 6 months at a U.S. university to improve their teaching curricula in agricultural and agribusiness economics.

In addition, OAA's partners offer a wide range of assistance. U.S. Wheat Associates, for example, granted the Ministry of Vocational Training more than 200,000 TD in 2003 to establish a wheat-testing laboratory in Tunis. Another prominent OAA partner, the U.S. Grains Council, regularly sponsors seminars to enhance Tunisian skills on feed formulations and utilization of corn and corn by-products.

➤ Funding agricultural research

On behalf of USDA/FAS, the OAA administers research grants in collaboration with the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA). The cumulative amount of these grants is almost US\$ 1 million in support of ongoing agricultural research projects in various fields such as biotechnology, weed control, drought mitigation, and biological diversity protection. A multi-year, multi-million research grant has been recently approved to bolster

biotechnology research and help Maghreb countries, including Tunisia, establish their biosafety regulatory frameworks.

USAID-sponsored programs

USAID was present and active in Tunisia from 1957 to 1995, funding and constructing important infrastructure such as the Tunis/Carthage airport, the Oued Nebhana Dam, pipeline and irrigation systems in Central Tunisia, the pulp plant at Kasserine, the faculties of Law, Political Science, and Economics at the University of Tunis, highways and bridges throughout Tunisia, and improvements in water supply systems for Tunisia's major cities.

USAID continues to fund several ongoing projects in Tunisia including technical assistance for the Sfax Technology Park, business development training for Information Technology small and medium-sized enterprises, assistance to the Tunisian National Telecommunications Regulator on the issue of "interconnectivity" between mobile service providers, overall regional cooperation, and assistance to the government of Tunisia on dealing with the issue of cyber crime.

Cultural Affairs

Tunisia is an active partner in the full range of US Government cultural and exchange activities, including:

- An active Fulbright program. This academic year 4 American lecturers, 5 American student researchers, and 1 senior researcher are working in Tunisia, and 10 Tunisian students and 6 Tunisian senior researchers are studying and working in the United States.
- The International Visitor Program brings participants from around the world to the United States each year to meet and confer with their professional counterparts and to experience the culture and diversity of the United States. Our International Visitors program handled over 25 IVs last fiscal year, and we look forward to sending a greater number to the United States in the coming year.
- 4 Tunisians are currently participating in the Humphrey Fellowship program, a competitive scholarship for mid-level professionals from around the world who have shown a demonstrated commitment to public service in both the private and public sectors. They spend a year in the U.S. engaged in study and professional experiences in a variety of fields, including public administration, law and human rights, finance and banking, educational planning, and many more.
- 18 Tunisians are currently participating in the Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant Program which provides an opportunity for young, international teachers of English to refine their teaching skills, increase their English language proficiency, and extend their knowledge of the cultures and customs of the United States while engaging in non-degree studies. FLTAs add an energetic and up-to-date cultural component to foreign language classes and to student life on U.S. campuses. This interaction makes studying and learning languages much more meaningful and real.
- 6 Tunisians are studying in the United States under the PLUS program. A PLUS scholarship puts a U.S. degree within the grasp of outstanding undergraduate students who are currently in their third year of study and who previously had little access to such opportunities.

Scholarship recipients travel to the U.S. for intensive English language training and pre-academic preparation before transferring to an undergraduate studies program.

- In 2005, 15 Tunisians benefited from the U.S. Department of State-funded Youth Exchange and Study (YES) scholarship program, which provides secondary school students in selected Middle Eastern, African, and Asian countries the opportunity to live and study in the United States for a full academic year.
- During the last few years we have increased the number and scope of cultural programs, including concerts, exhibits, speakers, and visiting specialists. For example in 2004 designer of the new World Trade Center in New York City, architect Daniel Libeskind, was one of several speakers who traveled to Tunisia and met with large groups of Tunisian students, professionals and opinion makers. The American Center funded a \$10,000 scholarship for a young filmmaker as part of the 20th Anniversary of the Carthage Film Festival. In 2005 we sponsored two weeks of basketball clinics with young Tunisians around the country and completed a two-week African American History Month speaker program. Also in 2005, we sponsored the visits of jazz, classical, gospel, and country western musicians to perform in numerous Tunisian music festivals and work with local music students. In addition, we provided a \$25,000 grant for the Tunisian production of a film documenting the visit of two NASA scientists during the November 2005 solar eclipse in Tunisia.
- The U.S. Embassy was pleased to have donated \$20,000 in furniture, computers, and equipment for the establishment of the Common Law Reading Room at the Faculté des Sciences Juridiques, Politiques, et Sociales de Tunis. This built upon a 2001 grant to the Faculté that provided a core library collection for the Common Law program as well as a two-year subscription to Westlaw (a legal periodical database). We continue to support visiting professors for this program.
- Under the US Government's Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation, in 2005, Embassy Tunis presented \$40,000 to assist the Association for the Preservation of the Medina in the restoration of the Ben Moussa Kuttab in the Medina of Tunis. An additional grant of \$31,000 was provided to the association to digitize its photo collection. The 2004 grant under this program financed the restoration of a site in Djerba.
- In January 2006, the U.S. Embassy provided \$35,000 in furniture, computers, books, and other resources for the establishment of an American Corner at AMIDEAST Tunis. This resource collection is designed to provide multi-functional study and programming opportunities for those Tunisians, particularly students, who are unable to come to the U.S. Embassy Information Resource Center.

Consular Affairs

We are pleased that new technologies are allowing us to maintain the security of the visa system while at the same time providing rapid service to Tunisians wishing to travel to the United States. Most qualified applicants now receive their visas within 24 hours of interview. Entry and exit requirements at the U.S. border have also become faster and more convenient for travelers. We continue to work to facilitate travel of Tunisian citizens to the United States. In the last 12 months, we have issued more than 3000 non-immigrant visas to Tunisian students, tourists, business people, and other travelers.

Security Cooperation

Tunisia is an important ally in the global war against terrorism. Over the past several years, the Diplomatic Security branch of the U.S. Department of State sponsored a series of anti-terrorism training courses for Tunisian security officials. Over 300 Tunisian security officials have participated in courses, conducted both in Tunisia and in the U.S. The programs included training in such areas as crisis response, explosive incidents countermeasures, airport security training, and anti-terrorism.

Humanitarian Assistance

U.S. Government Department of Defense Humanitarian Assistance (HA) to Tunisia totals 3.3 million over the past 6 years. Most HA programs were undertaken in cooperation with Tunisian NGOs. Unless otherwise stated, the construction of these facilities was contracted under a U.S. Government contract with a Tunisian construction contractor. Examples of completed and ongoing projects include:

- **The construction of additional classrooms and teachers' lodgings at the Cap Serrat Elementary School.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the local government of Sejnane. The additional classrooms were built by U.S. Navy Seabees. The teachers' lodgings were built by a local construction contractor. Total funding: \$135,000. The project was completed in 2002.
- **The construction of schools and vocational training centers for handicapped children in El Guettar and Sidi Bou Ali.** These projects were undertaken in cooperation with the national and regional branches of the Tunisian Union of Aid to the Mentally Handicapped (UTAIM). Total funding: \$460,000. Both projects were completed in 2004.
- **The construction of a school and vocational training center for handicapped children in Ariana.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the Association of the Parents and Friends of Handicapped Tunisians (APAHT). Total funding: \$240,000. The Navy crew from the U.S.S. Grapple put the finishing touches on the center in December 2004 to complete the project.
- **The refurbishment of a building in Tunis for use as a center/shelter for abused women and/or women with children in distress and the construction of two women's shelters in Tunis and Sousse respectively, to include apartments, an infirmary, nursery and social service office.** These projects were undertaken in cooperation with the National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT). Total funding: \$564,000. The project in Tunis was completed in 2004. The project in Sousse will be inaugurated in early 2006.
- **The refurbishment of a building in Beja to serve as a training center for rural NGOs.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the Association of Women for Sustainable Development (FDD). Total funding provided: \$30,000. The project was completed in 2004.
- **The construction of a "Training of Trainers" center for disaster relief volunteers in Tunis.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the Tunisian Red Crescent. Total funding provided: \$315,000. The project is scheduled for completion in late Spring 2006.

- **The construction of a school for deaf children in El Kef.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the Tunisian Association for Assistance to the Deaf (ATAS). Total funding provided: \$160,000. The project was completed in 2004.
- **The construction of a substance abuse rehabilitation center in Sfax.** This project was undertaken in cooperation with the Tunisian Association for Drug Abuse Prevention (ATUPRET). The center will provide temporary lodging to afflicted youth and focus on medical and psychological assistance as a means to reintegrate patients into mainstream society. Total funding provided: \$325,000. Construction began in February 2004 and is scheduled for completion in Spring 2006.
- **The construction of professional development centers for the handicapped in Nabeul and Menzel Temime.** These projects are currently being implemented in cooperation with the Tunisian Association of Parents and Friends of the Handicapped (APAHT). The center will specialize in training of the handicapped for employment within the handicraft, tourism and textile sectors. Total funding provided: \$523,600. Construction is scheduled for completion in the Fall 2006.
- **The construction of an AIDS testing center in Sfax.** This project is currently being implemented in cooperation with the Tunisian Association for the Prevention and Treatment of AIDS (MST/SIDA). The center will provide patients with confidential testing and patient advisory services concerning AIDS. The facility will also provide AIDS prevention education to the youth of this densely populated urban area. Total funding provided: \$250,000. Project development is in process. Construction is scheduled for completion in the Fall 2006.
- **Refurbishment of the Essaned Center for the Handicapped by U.S. Navy crewmembers.** In August 2005, sailors of the U.S. Navy ship U.S.S. Grasp teamed with Tunisian university students to repaint the Essaned Center for the Handicapped in Sidi Thabet, Tunisia. The supplies for the refurbishment were purchased with a \$3,000 grant from the European Command Humanitarian Assistance division.
- **Some of the above-mentioned facilities were partially equipped with excess furniture and equipment from DOD warehouses at Headquarters European Command.** The total estimated value of the property donated and shipping costs is \$300,000.

Military Cooperation

The U.S. Department of Defense and the Tunisian Ministry of Defense cooperate in a variety of areas.

- The Tunisian Ministry of Defense is an active participant in the U.S. Department of Defense “International Military Education and Training” (IMET) program. IMET has trained over 3,600 Tunisian military officers/technicians since its inception in the mid-1980s. In 2005, 64 Tunisian military personnel were trained through the IMET program, at a value of \$1.85M. Training includes officer development courses, professional schools, and technical training.
- The U.S. Department of Defense also supports Tunisia’s counter-terrorism program through bilateral training exercises and special counter-terrorism training courses for selected Tunisian participants and units.

- The U.S. Department of Defense and the Tunisian Ministry of Defense engage in personnel exchanges and military-to-military events that enhance understanding and cooperation between our countries. Events include visits to units, orientation and observation of technical support programs, and professional development seminars.
- Tunisia received approximately 10.4 million dollars in Foreign Military Finance (FMF) support in 2005. FMF is an ongoing program which helps to sustain and modernize Tunisia's military forces and equipment and enhances our overall military cooperation programs.